

# Why did Bananaman never star in his own video game?

**written by dreamkatcha**

Bananaman first appeared in issue one of the zany British comic book Nutty published by DC Thomson. Circulated between 1980 and 1985, Nutty was finally merged with The Dandy, which Big B would come to call home until its depressing demise in 2012 ended the classic comic's [record-breaking](#) 75-year run. An online edition was unveiled on the same day, yet failed to inspire the imagination of its target audience, hence was wound up within six months.



Ever-versatile (much like the Littlest Hobo), the quintessentially British Bananaman subsequently switched to DC Thomson's other long-running amalgam comic book, The Beano, where he remains a going concern.

DCT must grant him time off for good behaviour every now and again because I most recently bumped into the yellow and blue goofball at the Manchester Central Library. Along with The Beano's other 'Mischief Makers', Bananaman was there to promote the joy of reading.

During his main gig downtime, Bananaman was known to 'split' himself between the BBC's short-lived Look-In 'beater', BEEB, and The Funday Times, the Sunday Times' kiddie section.

BEEB both emerged and shrivelled to dust in 1985 following a run of just 20 issues, while The Funday Times was published between 1989 and 2006.

In 1983 'the man of peel' was transformed into an animated TV show voiced by comedy trio, The Goodies, comprising Tim Brooke-Taylor, Graeme Garden, and Bill Oddie.



40 five minute episodes were produced over the course of three annual series, broadcast initially in the UK and subsequently syndicated in Australia where 'banana brains' was equally popular.



If you're interested in finding out who brought it to life, and how, you can check out issue 13 of the [Animator Mag](#). On page 14, how much the BBC paid for each episode is also revealed. The figures may surprise you.

As of 2004, you can buy the complete, unremastered, three series set on DVD. Despite having not been updated in any way, it's a massive improvement on the VHS quality 'tapings' we made as kids. That said, some of the deafening background music and sound effects really overwhelm the dialogue, particularly during series one. I don't know if that was an issue with the original broadcasts, or introduced by the transfer to DVD. Incidentally, the same sets (inexplicably minus the intro and credits) have been uploaded to YouTube by the official Beano channel team.

Bananaman also made it to the states, yet wasn't embraced with nearly the same degree of affection. Odd since so many Americans have a penchant for British humour.



Squidged out onto the small screen, the show starred Eric Twinge - known as Eric *Wimp* in the original comic - an average, ordinary schoolboy... *until* he eats a banana. Only then does he become the eponymous Bananaman, a pseudo-saviour parody of half a dozen traditional superheroes rolled into one, capably aided by his faithful pet crow. 'Crow' speaks perfect English and is the brains of the operation... and let's face it, Bananaman needs all the help he can get. What passes for his grey matter is wannabe banana bread... bruised, battered mush.

What? That's how you make it, it's a cooking joke. Well, Gordon Ramsay would have laughed.

Precisely how Bananaman's powers emerged remains vague throughout. He emanates from the moon, arriving on earth as a baby via a rocket; because bananas resemble the shape of a crescent moon, eating them somehow confers special abilities. Writers Steve Bright and Dave Donaldson were evidently shooting for farce status stickers... they clearly hit the target!

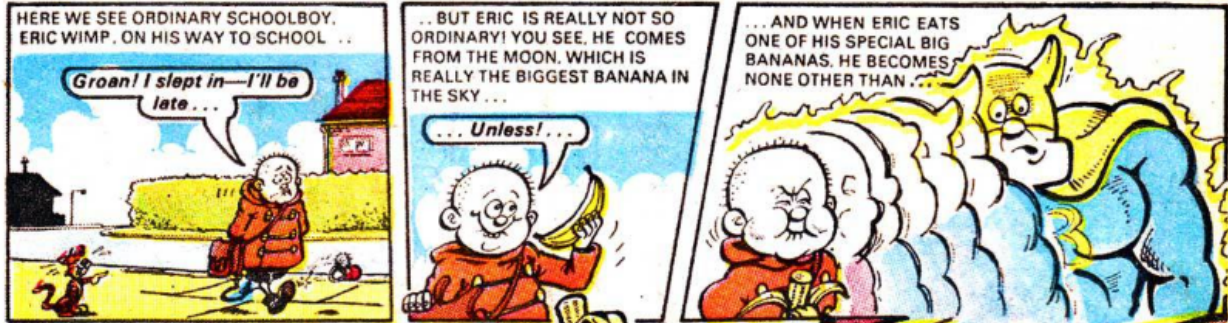
On that note, you should check out the 150-minute musical adaptation staged in 2018!



Regardless, a supercharged Eric can fly (well, *swim* or *stroll* through the ether really), possesses superhuman strength and is virtually invincible. Except for his kryptonite-esque Achilles' Heel that is; *mouldy* bananas!

Luckily, whenever overwhelmed by the stress and burden of superheroism, Bananaman can slink off back to his own personal Fortress of Solitude, constructed from a humongous banana and situated in the North Pole.

While Bananaman is endowed with the "muscles of twenty men", he's also lumbered with "the brains of twenty mussels", much like his alter-ego, Eric. He begins life as a punk skinhead in the comic after all, before cultivating his banana skin shaped quiff... or are they fronds?



Like all superheroes, Bananaman faces a number of supervillains, themselves hybrid parodies of pop culture baddies and American comic book foes borrowed from the 'Silver Age'.

Focusing on just two of the *core* examples (Appleman is more of a stoogey sidekick, alluding to Superman's Bizarro), you'll never guess which Marvelous adversary mad scientist, Doctor Gloom, riffs on. General Blight, on the contrary, is earmarked as a covert Hitler impersonator, though really represents generic ranting army generals... erm, *generally*.

Rather than detecting his own evil-mongering criminality, Bananaman teams up with Chief O'Reilly, a thinly veiled homage to Clancy O'Hara, the Gotham City Chief of Police who features in the 1966 Batman TV show. Even so he looks uncannily like Irish actor, Colm Meaney, if you ask me. Maybe not so much 35 years ago.

Whenever O'Reilly (or even General Blight!) has a new assignment for Bananaman he makes contact via his conduit, Eric, assuming he has a special hotline to the fruity one. Eric then 'relays' the brief to Bananaman, trying his utmost not to reveal his secret identity. Assuming Bananaman can remember how to fly, he then leaps into action, and with more luck than skill, *hopefully*, saves the day without causing too much catastrophic destruction.

All in all the perfect ingredients for a comedy-action gaming translation. Obviously bananas would supply B-man's energy, which he'd need to keep munching to remain in his transformed state. Running out would trigger a switch back to Eric. That could signal the end of the game, or activate our 'last chance saloon', penultimate life, analogous to King Arthur's suit of armour in *Ghouls 'n' Ghosts*.

Bananas would also serve as B-man's weapons, each variety delivering a different kind of impact. And there *are* plenty of naturally occurring ones. Notalotta people know that...

There's the scarlet banana, pink banana, Fe'i banana, snow banana, and even the *false* banana, which ironically is as genuine as any of them.

Banana leaves are employed in some regions for fabricating umbrellas. So there's our first defensive power-up... this stuff writes itself.

'Bananaman: The Game' could even be a two-player collaborative affair with a second person controlling Crow to deliver fruit fuel to the leading man. You wouldn't have to invent any baddies either because the comic and TV show are stuffed with creative options. The robot snowman would have been cool... you know because of the chilly climate, but also because he's jolly darn awesome.

Platforming could be blended with underwater and airborne shoot 'em up elements as the Big B jettisons into the sky or sea to conquer The Weatherman's 'lighter than airship'. That would certainly have ticked the multi-genre medley box for Ocean.

Fiona, B-man's newsreader love interest modelled on Selina Scott (and voiced by Jill Shilling), is a ready-made damsel in distress. Saving her would need to be the objective in at least

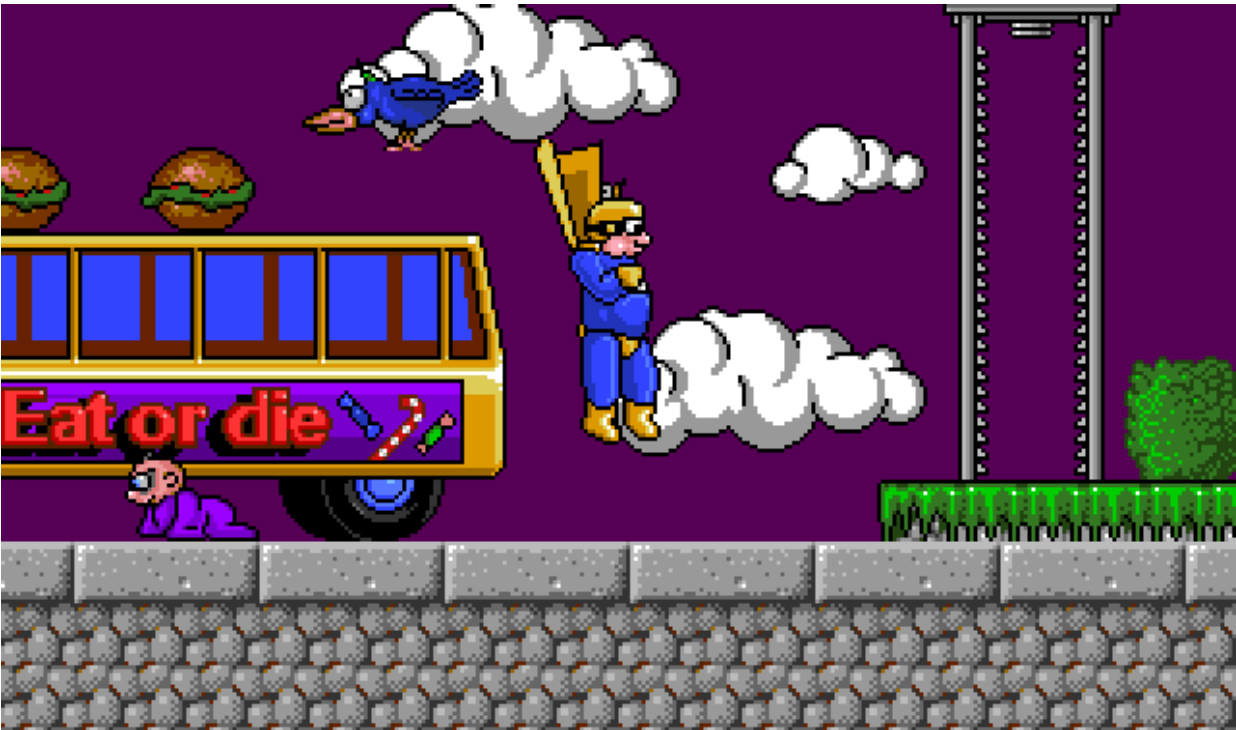


the *first* Bananaman game. After that, the world's your Acacia Drive.

In terms of interactive potential, Bananaman is a neatly wrapped gift with a fancy velvet bow and a cherry on top. So why then have no games ever been produced starring this admittedly unlikely, yet lovably dopey hero? The closest we ever came is probably Codemasters' Captain Dynamo (1992).



That, or Black Legend's Fatman: the Caped Crusader (1994).



I don't think '[Chase in Space](#)' counts; it's a Flappy Birds clone made in Flash.

What's equally unfathomable is that I've not stumbled across any evidence to suggest that Bananaman has ever been involved in fronting a national, government-backed campaign to promote healthy eating, or to boost 'nana sales on behalf of Fyffes, Chiquita, Dole et al.

What's the deal there, PR people? Surely he'd be the prime candidate. To dispel the myth that bananas are mega-super-duper high in potassium too. In fact, they only provide 8% of our recommended daily allowance, making them an inferior source compared to spinach, baked potatoes, soybeans and so on.

Hungry for more trivia, nutrition fans? No? Well here are some extra tidbits anyway. Bananas contain the same levels of magnesium as potassium, and 13% of our RDA of manganese, so they're not just single-minded potassium

peddlers. Fascinating, eh? No, wait, I'll move on I promise. Soon.

Is Bananaman considered too stupid to lead a class on healthy eating? That's just discrimination that is! Stupidity - I'll have you know - makes the world go round in *many* ways.

Knowing that back in the '90s Alternative Software planned to develop a game revolving around Dennis and Gnasher, another IP belonging to DC Thomson, I contacted them to find out if they ever had any intention to develop a Bananaman title too.

Dave Palmer told me "Sorry I cannot help you with this. We were going to initially do two games, one on the Bash Street Kids, and another on Dennis and Gnasher."

He says 'initially' because neither game ultimately came to fruition (pun entirely intended). [Dennis and Gnasher](#) was previewed in three Amiga magazines in January/February 1994 (Amiga Format even declared it finished and 'available now'), while [Bash Street Kids](#) was cancelled before reaching the stage where it would be ready for showcasing.

Any attempts made today to set matters right where Bananaman is concerned - according to Start Licensing's Ian Downes - may fall on deaf ears because Bananaman is first and foremost seen as a bit of an antiquity.

"Bananaman is most often positioned as a classic retro character, so there is a challenge sometimes in engaging with people who may not immediately recognise him.

That said, the reverse of that coin is that we often meet people who are big Bananaman fans and then the challenge is getting down to talking about a deal rather than discussing their favourite episode."

- [The cult appeal of Bananaman](#) (7th September 2015)



If *anyone* had plans to pixelise Bananaman you'd imagine it would be Ocean Software - masters of the licensed gaming tie-in. With this in mind, I quizzed former Ocean artist, Simon Butler, to discover if he'd ever been asked to get onboard such a project.

No was the answer. He's worked on well over 300 games during his long and varied career and never once has a proposal to eulogise Bananaman in pixels been put to him. He was as perplexed as I am.

Rather than asking a representative from every single retro games development studio I could think of, I decided to cover all the bases in one fell swoop by raising the issue with DC Thomson themselves.

Martin Lindsay, Licensing Manager, informed me that...

"We have had a few tentative approaches over the years but think perhaps that Bananaman was overshadowed by the 'bigger' players in our Portfolio of Dennis the Menace, Desperate Dan, Bash Street Kids etc.

But even with this character set, there was only really one game that impacted on the market - Beanotown Racing, developed by Simian industries and released by Zoo Digital. Bananaman was one of the characters used within the game."

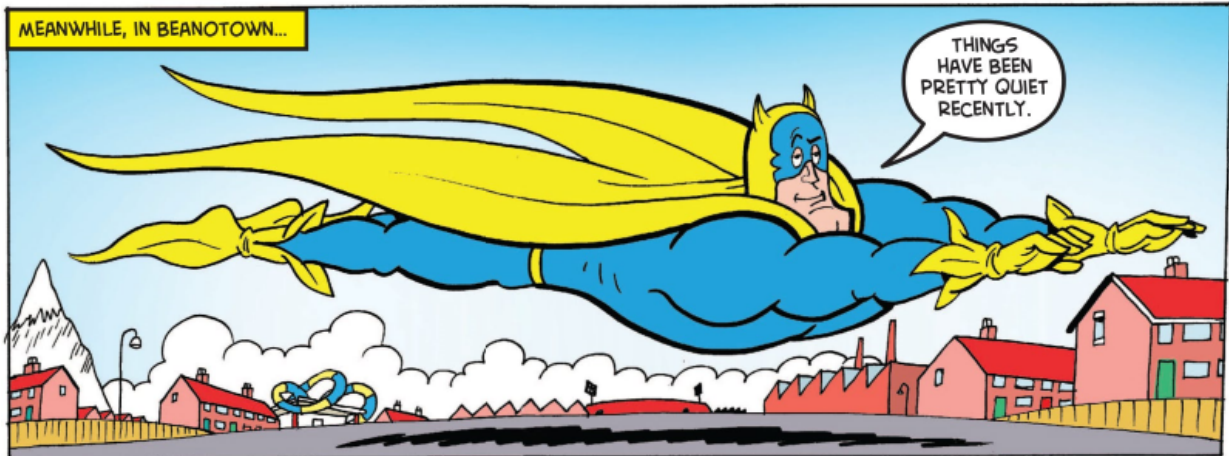


So Bananaman makes a cameo appearance as a playable character in a single game, published as late as 2003, though has never actually starred exclusively in his own.



This seems to be a bit of a trend for the 'nana addict who tricked us into healthy eating as kids.

It was announced in 2014 that DCT would be teaming up with Elstree Studio Productions to film a live-action movie adaptation of Bananaman with an ETA of 2015. A musical title score and poster escaped into the wild... ostensibly that's as far as development commenced. We're still awaiting an update on the silver screen iteration.



On the eve of Spider-Man 2's release, Andrew Garfield was asked how he felt about the threat posed by the upcoming, bendy competition...

"Terrified. Bananaman is going to be the most lucrative superhero franchise. Ever. Bananaman is going to blow The Avengers and that Katniss Everdeen girl out of the water!"

A crying shame that perhaps we'll never get to find out. All pre-production work undertaken thus far appears to have been a fruitless exercise. Boom-boom-tish!

Meanwhile, back on the small screen (or *monitor* to be precise), I'm still curious to know who made those "tentative enquiries" to DCT, what the developers behind them had in mind, and why nothing ultimately materialised. It appears that Martin wasn't at liberty to say for reasons of a confidentiality nature, which is perfectly understandable.

Aside from being overshadowed by DCT's more recognisable characters, I'd hazard a guess that B-man's failure to find a foothold in the US went a long way towards putting the kibosh on a gaming translation. America is an enormous market for game development studios, one most couldn't afford to write off. It would make much more sense to secure



the rights to promote an *internationally* appreciated IP and build a business model around tapping that.

Despite the cartoons we remember growing up visually glued to for hours on end being aimed primarily at kids, some also contain material designed to jive with adults. One-liners or allusions understood on another level by an older audience that would intentionally fly right over the heads of children.

Bananaman *isn't* one of those shows. There's very little to be discovered by watching it today as an adult that you wouldn't have understood as a child. Off the top of my head only one line springs to mind at the moment: "Yes, we have no bananas", Eric is informed by the local greengrocer when his stock dries up.

Oh, and the plantain gags stand out too now my neural cogs are in motion. I'd have had no idea what *they* are as a sprog. Neither did Bananaman as an adult apparently.

Notwithstanding the above (and the ten other examples that will inevitably come flooding back seconds after posting this article), Bananaman was written purely for pre-teen kids. Not to stretch the literary talents of Steve and Dave, or amuse future adult-kids like us.

As such, in spite of the enormous potential for cheap and predictable innuendo, the writers never descended into Carry On style smut. Not even on a subliminal level. Its 'universal', innocent BBFC rating hasn't slipped since Super B's inception.

It's a show carried by witty wordplay with dollops of punnery, delivered by esteemed voice-over artists, complemented by very literal, slapstick visual gags illustrated by the late John Geering.

This clean, universally accessible approach I believe would have limited the target market further. A game that can only be sold to very young (British and Australian) kids isn't nearly as lucrative a proposition as one posed by a character like Sonic for example.

Still, when overheads were low - as with developing games for computers with floppy disk or cassette decks - some studios would relish the opportunity to take the bait regardless. Sooty and Sweep received *several* licensed games after all. Above all else, Alternative Software and Hi-Tec Software were notorious for scooping up the rights to produce games based on minor and obscure properties.

If you worked for an outfit with a similar outlook, and at some point contemplated entrusting the fate of the banana-caped blunderer to us joystick junkies, I'd love to hear from you.